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Clean It!

Safer House-Cleaning Methods that Really Work!

*Revised — includes new tips for making
informed choices about cleaning products.*

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**BAY AREA POLLUTION
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A Committee of Bay Area Clean Water Agencies

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Use this Guide for a Clean Home and a Clean Bay!

You don't need harsh chemical cleaning products to clean your home. Common household products like baking soda and white vinegar are good all-purpose cleaners.

There are very good reasons to make the switch - some retail cleaning products can be hazardous to your health and the health of your family and pets. The hazards can come from chemical fumes, improper mixing of more than one product, or from children or pets ingesting the products.

In addition, some chemicals in products disposed of down the drain may end up in San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. The resulting "chemical soup" can adversely affect aquatic creatures, and contribute to the build up of toxins in the fish we eat.

By buying and using fewer potentially hazardous products in the first place, you'll create a safer place for you, your family and pets, and the environment.

For more information contact BAYWISE at 1-888-BAYWISE (229-9473), or visit www.baywise.org.

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What's in this Guide

This guide provides tips on safer cleaning products and methods.

The recommended safer methods listed in this guide are effective. The key to easier, safer cleaning is prevention. By preventing build-up of dirt, housecleaning will be easier. Also, you can get good results with fewer chemicals if you use the right tools and techniques – and this guide shows you how. Once you've reduced your reliance on specialty cleaning products, you can save money, too, since homemade products in this guide cost less.

If you feel you need to buy a cleaning product available from retail stores, this guide offers suggestions for selecting and using those products, but we recommend trying the safer methods first.

Many retail cleaning products should not be disposed of down drains or thrown away in the garbage. The proper disposal methods are listed in this guide.

By following the recommended safe cleaning methods in this guide, you can avoid the hazards of some cleaning products, and also help protect the waters of the bay and ocean.

Getting Started

Switching to safer cleaning products is simple. Just incorporate the cleaning products and tools listed on the following pages into your regular household cleaning methods.

Here are some tips for getting started:

- Evaluate the cleaning products you already have. Use them up, if appropriate, or follow the safe disposal methods listed in this guide.
- Get organized. Gather all of your supplies, like baking soda and white vinegar. Check the Shopping List and Tools sections in this guide for other items you may need.
- Test tools, techniques, and products in a small, inconspicuous area first to see if results are satisfactory.
- If there are children or pets in your home, set up a safe, secure storage place for hazardous materials.
- Ask your school-age children to help you evaluate and select the least toxic cleaning products - it may make a good science project for them.

Cleaning Tips

The more frequently you clean, the less effort it will take, because cleaning more frequently will help prevent dirt, harmful bacteria and mold from building up. In addition, frequent cleaning helps keep pests such as ants and roaches under control.

Consider the following tips:

Frequently: Wash dishes, clean kitchen sink, counters, and stovetops. Wipe showers after each use. Sweep or vacuum floors and carpets.

Regularly: Wash hard surface floors. Dust furniture. Clean bathroom sink, bathtub, shower, and toilet.

Occasionally: Wash windows. Clean refrigerator, kitchen cabinets, garbage can, and oven.

Immediately: Clean up spills - the longer you leave the spill the more the spill will set and stain. Use a cloth or sponge to absorb spills on carpets, rugs, and furniture, then swab or wipe the spill with a damp cloth.

Use the right cleaning tools and keep them in good working order.

Don't mix cleaning products and tools - use one sponge for toilets, and another for sinks and showers.

Wash rags, sponges, and brushes in the clothes washer once a week. Bacteria collect quickly in cleaning tools, so it's very important to wash them regularly.

Homemade Cleaning Products

You can make cleaning products using basic ingredients such as baking soda and lemon juice, with recipes and tips provided in this guide. Additional recipes for homemade cleaning products can be found in various websites and home product books listed in the [Resources](#) section.

When making and using safer cleaning products, keep these important points in mind:

Homemade products should be labeled to identify the ingredients in your mixture. **Never use food and drink containers for mixtures, as this is a common cause of accidental poisoning.**

Mixtures should always be kept in a child-resistant container and out of reach of children and pets, such as in locked cabinets, and not where food is stored.

Avoid using dairy products, such as mayonnaise or milk, for cleaning purposes because they may encourage bacterial growth and cause health risks.

When using a product, test a small inconspicuous area first to see if results are satisfactory.

Shopping List

The following are basic ingredients for making homemade cleaners. See the [Cleaning Tools](#) section for other items you may wish to purchase. Now, there are also many retail products that claim to be environmentally friendly – make sure to check the [Safety Tips: Buying Retail Cleaning Products](#) section to choose wisely.

Store all homemade and retail cleaners out of reach of children and pets. Don't store retail cleaning products where food is stored!

Recommended Safer Products

Baking soda with water, makes an all-purpose cleaner.

Borax removes stains on toilet bowls.

Lemons remove greasy fingerprints on windows.

Toothpaste cleans silver.

Vegetable-based liquid soap (such as castile soap) diluted with water makes an all-purpose cleaner.

Salt can remove red wine stains.

White distilled vinegar, diluted in water, is also a good all-purpose cleaner, and rinses and removes baking soda residue.

Cleaning Tools

White nylon scrubber sponge as an abrasive tool for scrubbing surfaces. If it doesn't work, use a more abrasive tool, such as **very fine steel wool**. It's important to not scratch the surface, so always use tools with liquid, be gentle, and test for scratching.

Old 100% cotton clothing, diapers, or towels for dusting and cleaning; or try **microfiber cleaning cloth**

Toothbrush for cleaning small crevices

Spray bottles (small and large) for mixing and spraying your homemade cleaners

Scrub brush (large) with stiff bristles for cleaning tile grout

Rubber gloves to protect your hands

Goggles to cover your eyes

Plunger and snake for clogged drains

Squeegee with replaceable blades for drying mirrors, glass doors, and windows

Very fine steel wool for scrubbing more resistant dirt

Pumice bar for cleaning toilet bowl stains

Sponge mop with attached scrub pad

"Handyman's" apron or plastic bin to carry your tools and products around with you

Single-edge razor blade or **paint scraper**

Safety Tips: Buying Retail Cleaning Products

We encourage you to use the safer methods listed in this guide. If you already have potentially hazardous cleaning products on hand, or if you feel you must buy them for a specific purpose, follow these safety tips:

Read the Label

Look for these words:

Caution, Warning, Danger or **Poison**.

These words are placed on product labels to alert consumers to acute toxicity of the products, Caution being the least toxic and Danger being the most toxic. However, these signal words pertain only to the **immediate** (acute) hazard of the product. In most instances, labels do not provide information about the **long-term** (chronic) hazards to humans or the environment, such as whether a product contains a chemical suspected of causing birth defects, kidney or liver damage, cancer, or lung disease.

Avoid products with labels that say things like:

- Harmful or fatal if swallowed
- Use only in a well-ventilated area
- Flammable or combustible
- Do not use near heat or flame
- Do not smoke while using
- Causes severe burns on contact
- Can burn eyes or skin

Buy only the amount you need, instead of the larger, economical size. This will minimize the potential for spills as well as the potential for excess products that go unused and may be disposed of in an improper manner.

Safety Tips: Ingredients to Avoid

Some ingredients have more risk of harming you or the environment than others and should be avoided. If you decide to use a retail product, read the labels and try to choose products that don't have the harmful chemicals shown here in this table. If that's not possible, then use **extreme care** - wear gloves and goggles, have a good supply of fresh air, and keep children and pets safely away.

Ingredients to Avoid	Hazards	Found In	Alternatives
NMP (n-methyl pyrrolidone) Perchloroethylene Petroleumnaphtha	Carcinogen, reproductive harm, central nervous system, skin-absorbing (liver, kidney)	Carpet cleaners, upholstery cleaners, metal cleaners	See the Carpets and the Metal Polishes sections.
Potassium hydroxide Sodium hydroxide	Corrosive-causes blindness	Oven cleaner, drain opener	See the Ovens and Drains sections.
Hydrochloric acid Phosphoric acid	Corrosive-causes blindness	Toilet bowl cleaner	See the Toilet Bowls section.
Glycol ethers, such as butoxyethanol	Skin-absorbing poison (liver, blood, kidneys)	General purpose, glass, and floor cleaners	See the All-Purpose Cleaners , Scouring Cleaners , and Floors sections.

Resources

Check the following websites and books for homemade cleaning remedies, and for additional information about the safety of retail cleaning products and the ingredients they contain:

Homemade Cleaning Products	<i>Clean and Green</i> , Annie Berthold-Bond, 1994. Ceres Press.
	<i>Clean House, Clean Planet</i> , Karen Logan, 1997. Simon and Schuster Pocket Books.
	<i>The Environmentally Sound Guide to Cleaning Your Home</i> , Linda Mason Hunter, 2005. Melcher Media.
Homemade Cleaners AND Chemical Safety	<i>The Safe Shopper's Bible</i> , David Steinman and Samuel Epstein, MD, 1995. Macmillan.
	Health & Env. Resource Ctr. – www.herc.org/maketheconnection
Chemical Safety	The Green Guide – www.thegreenguide.com
	Janitorial Pollution Prevention Project – www.westp2net.org
	Cleaning and Maintenance Management – www.cmmonline.com
	Design for the Environment – www.epa.gov/dfe/
	Green Seal- www.greenseal.org
	Washington Toxics Coalitions – www.watoxics.org
	City and County of San Francisco – www.SFApproved.org
	Material Safety Data Sheets resource: www.ilpi.com/msds
	Environmental Working Group – www.ewg.org

Safety Tips: At Home and After Use

When using any cleaning product, be sensible about protecting yourself from harmful effects of chemicals. Even the “safer” products discussed in this guide can irritate your skin and burn your eyes if you’re not careful.

At Home

Request the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) by calling the (800) customer service number on the label, or check the internet for MSDS information.

www.ilpi.com/msds

Use only the prescribed amount - more is **not** always better.

Use products in well-ventilated areas. Breathing too much of products such as chlorine, drain cleaner, oven cleaner, or solvents can irritate the skin, lungs, eyes, and/or cause dizziness.

Keep children and pets away from where you are cleaning to avoid distraction.

Don’t clean and cook at the same time to avoid contamination.

Wear protective clothing, gloves and goggles. When finished, remove protective clothing and wash separately from regular clothing.

Use **extreme care** when using toxic or caustic products. Follow the safety precautions printed on the label without exception, particularly with respect to the use of protective clothing, gloves, and goggles and maintaining good ventilation. **Never mix products containing chlorine bleach with those containing ammonia or acid. These mixtures create a lethal poisonous gas.**

After Use

Keep lid tightly closed. If a child-resistant lid is provided, use it.

Keep products in original container so you know what they are.

Store products out of reach of children and pets, such as in a locked cabinet, and not where food is stored.

Dispose of chemicals at your local Household Hazardous Waste Facility.

Even though the label may instruct you to dispose of the product in the trash, California has strict rules about what may go in the trash. See the [Safe Disposal](#) and the [Drain and Garbage Can’s and Can’t’s](#) sections for more information.

Never dump chemicals down storm drains or catch basins.

Safe Disposal

Despite what some product labels say, many household products, including paints, motor oil, garden products, and certain cleaning products, should not be disposed of down sinks, in toilets, floor drains, or in the garbage. Some household products contain toxic pollutants which, when disposed of in indoor drains, pass through wastewater treatment plants and end up in San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean, harming fish, aquatic species and wildlife. Throwing away household products in the garbage can harm garbage

collectors, and, once in the landfill, may eventually contaminate groundwater, the atmosphere, and/or poison wildlife.

We encourage you to dispose of your household hazardous waste safely and conveniently through your local Household Hazardous Waste Facility.

Disposing of chemical products at the Household Hazardous Waste Facility helps prevent water pollution. See www.baywise.org for additional water pollution prevention information.

Alameda County	(800) 606-6066	www.household-hazwaste.org
Contra Costa County		
Central County	(800) 646-1431	www.centalsan.org
East County	(925) 756-1900	www.ddsd.org
West County	(888) 412-9277	www.recyclemore.com
Marin County	(415) 485-6806	www.marinsanitary.com
Novato residents only	(415) 892-7344	www.unicycler.com
Napa County	(800) 984-9661	www.naparecycling.com
San Francisco City and County	(415) 330-1425	www.sfrd.com
San Mateo County	(650) 363-4718	www.recycleworks.org
Santa Clara County	(408) 299-7300	www.sccgov.org
Palo Alto residents only	(650) 496-6980	www.cityofpaloalto.org
Solano County	(707) 421-6765	www.co.solano.ca.us
Sonoma County	(707) 565-3375	www.recyclenow.org

Disposal Guidelines for Household Hazardous Waste

Follow these important guidelines when using the Household Hazardous Waste services:

For guidance about what to bring to the Household Hazardous Waste Facility see the [Drain and Garbage Can's and Can'ts](#) section.

Do not transport more than 5 gallons or 50 pounds of hazardous waste in your vehicle. State law prohibits transportation of larger amounts without a license.

Do not mix products.

Keep all chemicals in their original container. If the original container is not available, then label the container with its ingredients.

Make sure lids are sealed tightly.

Prevent leakage. Pack containers in plastic or newspapers and put them into a larger container that can hold the product if a leak occurs.

These items cannot be accepted at the local facilities: radioactive materials (such as smoke alarms), explosives, reactive, and pressurized gas cylinders over 20 pounds.

Business owners with hazardous waste may call the telephone numbers listed in the [Safe Disposal](#) section and ask for information on Very Small Quantity Generator (VSQG) disposal.

Drain and Garbage Can's and Can'ts

When in doubt about how to dispose of a product, call your local Household Hazardous Waste Collection Facility.

What Can Go Down the Drain

Homemade cleaning products are safe to dispose down the drain without risk of chemical, physical, or biological harm to plumbing and wastewater treatment processes.

What Can Go in the Garbage

Any empty and dry container (5 gallons or less in capacity) that has no continuous flow of liquid is safe to dispose in the garbage.

What Can't Go Down the Drain or in the Garbage

The following should not be disposed down the drain or put in the trash. Containers of unwanted products should be taken to the Household Hazardous Waste Collection Facility:

Cleaning products (e.g., products with words like "toxic", "corrosive", "flammable", or "ignitable" mentioned on the label)

Automotive products (e.g., motor oil, antifreeze, brake fluids)

Garden supplies (e.g., pesticides, herbicides, fungicides)

Paints and solvents (e.g., latex and oil-based paints, thinners, strippers) - Do not clean oil-based paintbrushes in the sink

Art and hobby supplies (e.g., glues, photographic chemicals, paints)

Medical waste, expired or unwanted medications, and hypodermic needles

ALL-PURPOSE CLEANERS

All-purpose cleaners can be used for counters, cabinets, stovetops, and other general areas. You can make cleaners on your own, or purchase safe retail cleaners. Always test homemade and retail cleaners on a small, hidden area to make sure it cleans to your satisfaction and doesn't scratch the surface.



Safer Methods

Add 1/4 to 1 teaspoon of vegetable-based dishwashing soap or other liquid soap (such as castile soap) to 8 ounces of water in a spray bottle. Spray on surfaces and wipe clean with a wet sponge or cloth. Wipe dry.

Make a solution of 9 parts warm water to 1 part white vinegar. Wipe with sponge or soft cloth. Make a stronger solution for tougher jobs.

Sprinkle baking soda or mix baking soda with water and scrub with a wet sponge. If the baking soda leaves a residue, rinse with cold water and dilute vinegar. Dry with a cloth.

For stains on counters, squeeze fresh lemon juice, let sit for 45 minutes, sprinkle baking soda, and rub with sponge or soft cloth.

Look for retail all-purpose cleaning products that are not hazardous. For example, use products with d-limonene (caution if you are allergic to citrus), amine oxide or methyl soyate - use with care (keep out of your eyes - wear goggles).

Prevention

Clean up spills immediately.

Clean counters and stovetops daily.

Be careful using abrasive cleansers on any surface – especially plastic, glass, porcelain, wood, painted surfaces, or stainless steel – they may scratch the surface and/or remove the finish.

SCOURING CLEANSERS

Some retail scouring cleansers contain silica or chlorine bleach. Silica can be dangerous if inhaled. Mixing cleansers containing chlorine bleach with other products containing acids or ammonia can create a poisonous gas. You can make effective scouring cleansers yourself or purchase retail products without silica or chlorine.



Safer Methods

Sprinkle baking soda or make a paste with baking soda and a small amount of liquid soap. Scrub with a damp white nylon scrubbing pad, soft cloth, sponge, or very fine steel wool. Test before using to make sure you don't scratch the surface. Rinse with vinegar if necessary. Dry with a cloth.

Retail scouring cleansers are available that do not contain silica or chlorine.

Prevention

Cleaning regularly helps to prevent build-up of grime.

Be careful using abrasive cleansers on any surface - especially plastic, glass, or porcelain, wood, painted surfaces, or stainless steel - they may scratch the surface and/or remove the finish.

GLASS CLEANER

Glass cleaners range from mild detergents to heavy-duty products with strong solvents. Some retail products are mists or aerosols, which are unhealthy to breathe. For aerosols, you end up paying extra just for the propellants. Water or dilute white vinegar is just as effective, if not better, than most retail glass cleaners on the market.

Safer Methods

For routine window cleaning, apply water with a soft cloth, squeegee dry, and rub with newspaper for a streak-free window (wear gloves to prevent ink from blackening hands).

If the windows are really dirty, mix ¼ cup white vinegar with water in a quart spray bottle. Use a white nylon scrubbing pad for stubborn dirt. Finish by rubbing with newspaper for a streak-free window (wear gloves to prevent ink from blackening hands).



To remove greasy fingerprints, put 1-tablespoon reconstituted (or strained fresh) lemon juice with warm water in a quart spray bottle.

Try products containing amine oxide, mild detergents, white vinegar, or similar lower toxicity ingredients. (Keep out of your eyes - wear goggles).

Prevention

Streaking is often a sign that the window cleaning product is too strong. Try adding a little water.

Do not clean windows in direct sunlight as this can also cause streaks.

Did you know that there are glass window products that repel dirt? Search the web for 'self-cleaning glass'.

KITCHEN CLEANERS

You can do most kitchen cleaning with homemade glass and all-purpose cleaner. To remove stubborn countertop rings or spots, use a mild scouring cleanser.



Safer Methods

Homemade glass cleaner or general purpose cleaner works well on chrome, porcelain, stainless steel, and other kitchen surfaces. See the [Glass Cleaner](#) and [All-Purpose Cleaners](#) sections.

Use liquid kitchen cleaners containing amine oxide, mild detergents, or methyl soyate.

To disinfect, usually soap and hot water will do the trick. To kill mold or fungus, use $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white vinegar in 1 gallon of cold water.

To remove stubborn countertop rings or spots, sprinkle baking soda or make a paste with baking soda and a small amount of liquid soap. Scrub with a damp white nylon scrubbing pad, soft cloth, sponge, or very fine steel wool. Test before using this method to make sure you don't scratch the surface. Rinse with white vinegar if necessary. Dry with a cloth.

Prevention

Cleaning regularly prevents grime build-up.

Install a plastic or glass backsplash around your stove and food preparation counters.

OVENS

Most retail oven cleaners contain sodium hydroxide, or lye, one of the most dangerous substances for household use. Sodium hydroxide mists can blind you, burn your nose and mouth, and damage your lungs.



Safer Methods

For lightly soiled ovens, make a thick paste with water and baking soda. Scrub well with a white nylon scrubbing pad. If the oven is greasy, add a small amount of liquid soap.

To remove spots, use very fine steel wool or a plastic scraper. Rubbing gently with a wet cleaning pumice bar will remove the toughest spots and will not scratch the surface. Retail oven cleaners are available that are non-caustic and do not contain lye.

Avoid products with the word "Danger" on the label.

Prevention

Preventing spills is the easiest and safest way to keep your oven clean - catch drips by placing aluminum foil or a metal tray underneath.

Spills are easier to clean up if they are attacked before getting baked on.

Clean the oven regularly.

DRAINS

Prevention is the key to keeping drains from becoming plugged. It is easier and more sensible than waiting for a crisis, and much safer than using chemical drain openers.

Safer Methods

For clogged drains, use a plunger or snake. Before using a plunger, be sure there is water standing over the drain. To get an airtight fit, apply petroleum jelly on rim. Push and pull vigorously. When using a snake, first remove all strainers or cross bars. Gently rotate snake and when resistance is felt, withdraw material carefully.

For roots in pipes, contact a plumber or root removal specialist to mechanically remove the roots. Be sure to tell service providers that you want mechanical removal, not chemical removal.

Prevention

Put a strainer or filter in all drains.

Never pour any type of grease down your drains because it can harden and clog your pipes.

Scrape or wipe grease and food scraps from dishes into the garbage or compost bin (or kitchen scrap recycling bin where available) before washing dishes.



After cooking, pour any grease or oil directly into a can or jar and:

- For grease that is a liquid at room temperature (such as vegetable oil from a fryer), see www.baywise.org for local disposal drop-off sites.
- For grease that solidifies at room temperature (such as bacon grease), toss the container in your garbage can.

Avoid using the garbage disposal. Food scraps often contain grease, which can harden and clog the plumbing after passing through the garbage disposal.

Once a week, put a handful of baking soda down the drain followed by boiling water.

Woody vegetation should be planted away from sewer lines to prevent blockages from roots.

BATHROOMS

Bathroom cleaners are designed especially to deal with soap scum and mildew on tubs, tiles, and showers. Many retail bathroom cleaners are also disinfectants, which temporarily kill germs on surfaces. Use the mildest product that meets your standards.



Safer Methods

To clean the sink, shower, tub, and tile grout, soak the area with diluted liquid soap, then sprinkle with baking soda and scrub with a white nylon scrubbing pad and scrub with a white nylon scrubbing pad and scrub with a white nylon scrubbing pad and scrub with a white nylon scrubbing pad. Rinse with cold water and, if necessary, add white vinegar to rinse.

To remove rust stains on porcelain or tile rub gently with pumice stone.

To clean mold from surfaces, use a mixture of 1-teaspoon of borax in a quart of hot water in a spray bottle. Wipe with a damp cloth or sponge.

To remove soap scum from glass shower doors, rub surfaces with Borax or diluted liquid soap and baking soda, and scrub with a white nylon scrubbing pad. For serious soap scum, use very fine steel wool. Rinse with cold water and, if necessary, add white vinegar to rinse.

To disinfect, spray or wipe with white vinegar.

Prevention

Bacteria, mildew, and mold generally cannot live without dampness, so keep surfaces dry by frequent wiping (use a squeegee in the shower) and keeping the bathroom well-ventilated.

Clean the bathroom frequently.

TOILET BOWLS

You may not need a special cleaner just for the toilet. Baking soda or a non-chlorine scouring powder should do the job. Toilet bowls generally don't stay germ-free for long no matter what you use.

Safer Methods

To clean, scrub with baking soda and/or liquid soap, or non-chlorine scouring powder.

To remove stains, pour 1/4 cup of borax into bowl and let sit for at least 30 minutes or overnight. Scrub bowl well and then flush.

To remove mineral deposits, scrub with bar of cleaning pumice. (Test for scratching before cleaning.)

To clean exterior toilet area, spray with liquid soap diluted in water. Check under toilet tank and all crevices. Dry with a cloth. For heavy dirt, see [Scouring Cleansers](#).

To disinfect an area, put white vinegar in a spray bottle. Apply and wipe clean.

Prevention

Clean the toilet frequently, perhaps weekly or more. Even if you purchase cleaners, the bowl won't stay germ-free for long. Frequent, thorough cleaning is the key no matter what cleaner you use.



CARPETS

Carpets need step-wise cleaning: frequent vacuuming, spot cleaning for spills, and occasional steam cleaning for removing deeper soil and dust. This approach is good for upholstery, too.

Avoid commercial spot removers with perchloroethylene.

Safer Methods

Vacuuming - Dirt accumulates just inside doorways, next to furnace cold air returns, and in closed rooms. Spend extra time vacuuming these areas.

Spills - Wipe up quickly before the stain becomes permanent. Use a dry rag or paper towel to soak up the spill. The next step depends on what was spilled:

Using water on a rag may remove the rest of the stain. Avoid warm or hot water, as these may set the stain.

Tackle oil or grease with your general purpose cleaner; sprinkle baking soda on any greasy residue to help absorb it, wait 10 minutes and then vacuum.

Cover red wine spill completely with salt to soak up the wine, then blot with a towel soaked in cold water and repeat as needed.

For tough stains, pet waste and ketchup, remove any solids with blunt



edged tool, and blot liquids with a dry cloth. Mix a teaspoon of mild detergent in a cup of water and then sponge the area with this mixture. Blot again with a clean, dry cloth. To remove odors, spray with a 1:3 parts white vinegar to water solution, and then blot again.

To remove room odors, sprinkle baking soda on the carpet, let stand for a few minutes then vacuum.

Steam Cleaning - There are now many environmentally-friendly commercial cleaning services. Ask what solvents or chemicals the company uses before hiring the service provider. **Make sure to avoid service providers that use perchloroethylene.**

Prevention

Prevent dirt from being tracked into the house by placing mats in doorways.

Vacuum frequently.

FLOORS

Floor care products include dust mop sprays, liquid cleaners, and finish restorers. Many retail products contain chemicals that have significant health and environmental impacts. You can look for safer products, or make your own.



Safer Methods

Mop vinyl or real linoleum with a diluted white vinegar solution. Use a stronger solution for tougher jobs.

To cut grease on vinyl floors, dilute a small amount of liquid soap with water. Mop then rinse with a diluted white vinegar solution.

For sealed wood floors, damp mop with diluted white vinegar or vegetable-based liquid soap and water. Do not use a wet mop, as you may cause damage to the wood. Dry immediately with a cloth.

To remove black heel marks on floors, rub with a pencil or typewriter eraser.

Prevention

Sweep or vacuum floors frequently to eliminate the need for using chemicals.

Scrub floors regularly.

Use area rugs to protect the floor.

Prevent dirt from being tracked into the house by placing foot mats at doorways.

FURNITURE

Rather than adding another special-purpose cleaner to the clutter under your sink, it's far less expensive to use a rag or sponge moistened with water and a little all-purpose cleaner or even a plain damp rag to clean your finished furniture. Before using any product or homemade cleaner, test a small inconspicuous area first to see if results are satisfactory.

Expensive antiques and teak furniture may require special care – consult an expert.



Safer Methods

To dust, wipe along the grain with a soft cloth or vacuum dust with a soft brush attachment.

To clean most spills and fingerprints, rub with a soft cloth, lightly moistened with water and a small amount of vegetable-based liquid soap. Buff immediately with a soft dry cloth, removing any residual water.

For dirtier surfaces, moisten a soft cloth with a small amount of vegetable-based liquid soap or all-purpose cleaner diluted in water. You can also mix 1 tsp white vinegar in 1 cup white vinegar in a spray bottle and wipe clean. Buff immediately with a soft dry cloth, removing any residual moisture.

To polish most wood surfaces, mix equal parts vegetable or olive oil with white vinegar. Apply small amounts of the mixture with a soft, dry cloth. Buff to shine.

Prevention

Dust frequently – regular dusting helps to prevent dirt from accumulating.

METAL POLISHES

Retail metal cleaners and polishes can vary widely in the hazards they pose. Try the safer methods listed below.

Safer Methods

For copper and brass, saturate a sponge or soft cloth with white vinegar or lemon juice, sprinkle salt on sponge and rub or make a paste by adding white flour. Rinse thoroughly and dry, otherwise it will corrode rapidly.

For silver, rub gently with toothpaste (paste, not gel). Rinse with warm water, then dry with a soft cloth.

For chrome, wipe with diluted white vinegar. Rinse with water, then dry. To clean oily stains on chrome, wipe with a small amount of liquid soap first, followed by diluted white vinegar. Polish with dry cloth.



For stainless steel, mix baking soda with water and clean. You can also add a small amount of liquid soap. Rinse with diluted white vinegar, buff with a dry cloth. Mineral deposits in tea kettles can be dissolved by filling with white vinegar, allowing to soak, and rinsing.

Prevention

Store silver behind glass, in cloth or plastic bags, or plastic wrap. Do not wrap silver with rubber bands because they can discolor the silver.

Thanks

The San Francisco Bay Area Pollution Prevention Group (BAPPG) has developed this guide to provide information on safer cleaning methods and products for the home. Our goal is to reduce the amount of toxic pollutants discharged into sewer systems and disposed of in the garbage. Any mention of individual products, vendors, or technologies does not constitute an endorsement by the BAPPG.

This 2011 revision was made possible by the following contributors:

Editors: Jen Jackson & Marie Kulka, East Bay Municipal Utility District; Sharon Newton, City of San José; Meg Gale, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission

Design: Todd Salerno, East Bay Municipal Utility District

Illustrations: Leesa Whitten

This Clean It! guide would not have been possible without many individuals' contributions to the original 1996 version and the revised 2003 Clean It! guides: City and County of San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, Water Pollution Prevention Program and Hazardous Waste Management Program; Thomas Barron; Gail Glen, City of Sunnyvale; Stephanie Hughes; Bonnie Lowe, Central Contra Costa Sanitary District; Gina Purin, Marin Countywide Stormwater Pollution Prevention Program; Barbara Ruff, Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District; Gayle Tupper, East Bay Municipal Utility District, Karl Bruskotter, City of Santa Monica; Rebecca Bauen, Women's Action to Gain Economic Security; Phillip Dickey, Washington Toxics Coalition; Gina Ryerson, professional low toxic housecleaner; Brian Johnson, City of Santa Monica; and Pamela Hodgins.

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